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FREE ENTRY

political consequences of framing the land question in times of climate emergencies

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An urbanist, Solomon Benjamin (PhD, MIT) is currently working on the practices and logics of land occupancy and tenurial histories, and the trans-national economies across India and China via smartphones reengineering. Following his influential concept Occupancy Urbanism (*International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2008), his recent publications include 'Majority Urban Politics and Lives Worth Living in a Time of Climate Emergencies' (with AbdouMaliq Simone, *Social Text*, 2022) and 'Land as Situated Spatio-Histories' (with Wing-Shing Tang, *Global Urbanism*, 2021). He presently anchors a collaborative multi-authored book manuscript, *Cities Untold: Negotiating spatial practices and imaginations* in both English and Mandarin that places text, photo graphics in epistemic equivalence.

In this seminar, Solomon Benjamin focuses on the importance of the land question to be thought of as complex and entangled tenurial realms. This is essential to provincialize urban theories where the material process of land transformation forms an analytical keystone shaping constellations of socio-spatial relations. This is different from posing land as being 'informal' or 'slum', whose constituent narratives shape interpretations of the climate crisis and what it means to be sustainable. This shift also makes for creative and exciting pedagogy, research methodologies and maintaining criticality across disciplines of geography, anthropology, sociology. Since public policy is now viewed as even more central, analysing contesting spatialities of institutional entanglements allows for both strategic and reflective policy framing. It calls to explore the depths of administrative procedures, often entangled with judicial spaces lobbied by particular groups – and their spatio-territorial effects. Thus, researching the urban needs to take seriously territory and the spatiality of land tenures. These ideas are revealed in several on-going collaborative research works by scholars focusing attention on 'majority' groups, in most of the world, observed in Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi; and also elsewhere, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Jo-Berg, Manchester, Quito. Here, entanglements of everyday territorial practices demand nuanced understandings of 'land as territory' and 'land as property'. It helps us rethink researching the city, pedagogy, perhaps across the binaries of the 'north and south'.

These concerns are not just of academic importance. As witnessed in Bangalore (August 2022) and Chennai (November 2015), not doing so, adhering to simplicity and assumed clarity has already resulted in great violence in real life. Just a month back in the context of the Bangalore floods, revealed how faulty conceptualization only empowers powerful groups to claim a moral high ground, whose resulting institutional disempowerment drowns the claims of the poorest. Here, many well meaning scholars fall into a conceptual quagmire to miss out subtleties of land regularisation and try to simplify a complex terrain. Similarly, in Jakarta too, as in the Indian cases, in these times of climate emergencies, the issue is more than just technical data. Rather what is a central analytic is the spatiality empowered by complex constellations of majority groups.

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